

Robert Morse
Portland
LD 2003

Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing, thank you for listening to my testimony in favor of LD 2003.

I am Robert Todd Morse, a resident of Portland and I am proud to live in a state where a bold law like this is up for discussion. Laws such as this one are what this Country and especially this State need to alleviate our housing crisis.

Our pattern of single family development is simply unsustainable. It is unsustainable environmentally; requiring more car trips, more asphalt for roads, and more energy for heat. It is also unsustainable financially, for both the State as a whole and individual Mainers.

To serve the sprawl of our suburbs this State has had to spend billions on constructing and maintaining car infrastructure. In the last eight years we have needed to issue bonds to pay for road infrastructure and maintenance. This year with a budget surplus of 100 million there are plans to spend much of it on maintenance of car infrastructure. There are further plans to spend the additional 1.3 billion in new Federal funding we will be receiving in Federal funds over five years on further maintenance, and even after all that spending we are expected to have a backlog of road maintenance. We cannot afford these roads. Imagine how much good could be done for Mainers with even a small fraction of this spending.

Individual Mainers are also feeling the squeeze of single family zoning. We are short an estimated 25,000 units of housing which has contributed to a massive increase in housing costs. Long time Mainers are being forced out or forced to spend more and more of their money on high rents and property taxes. It is difficult for young people to move to the state or buy their first homes to raise families in the state. This has economic consequences because we are missing out on the young workers we need to build our economy, but it also has human consequences; friends and families will be forced to move away, neighborhoods will be broken up.

Critics of this bill may claim that people don't want to live in denser housing. If this is true then this bill will not result in any more dense housing. This bill does not force anyone to do anything, it just gives people more options. Some people may prefer to live in single family homes and I would never try to stop them. In fact, this bill will make it even easier for people who want single family homes to get one because they will no longer be competing with people who would otherwise have chosen denser housing options.

This bill is a rare opportunity to improve the environment, improve the economy, provide economic relief to low and middle income people, and make it easier for new Mainers to move in while helping keep long time Mainers in the State.